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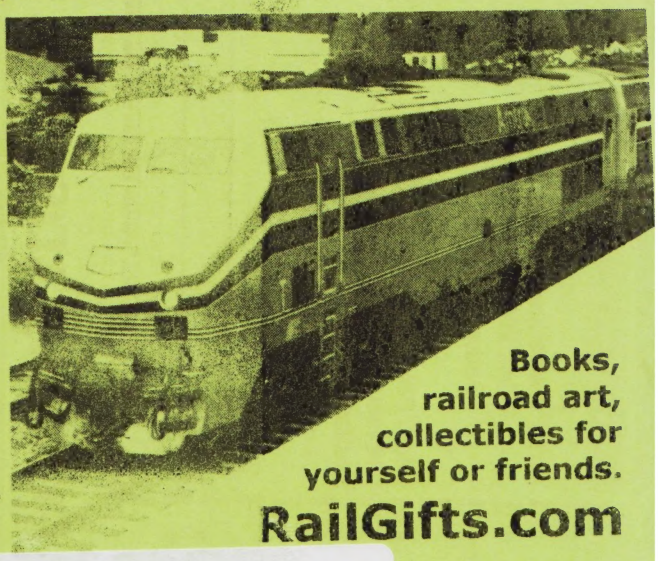

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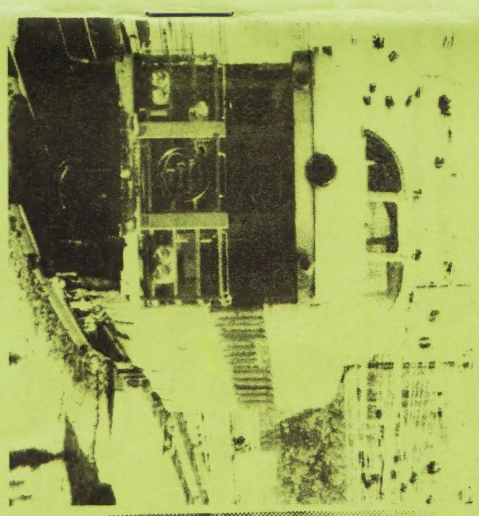

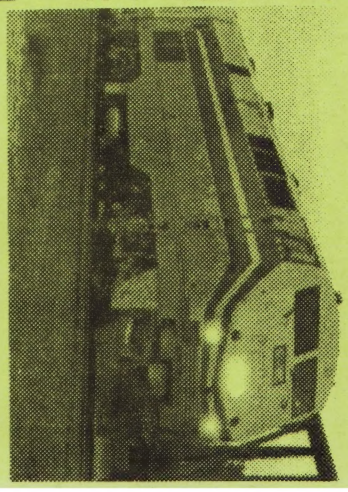

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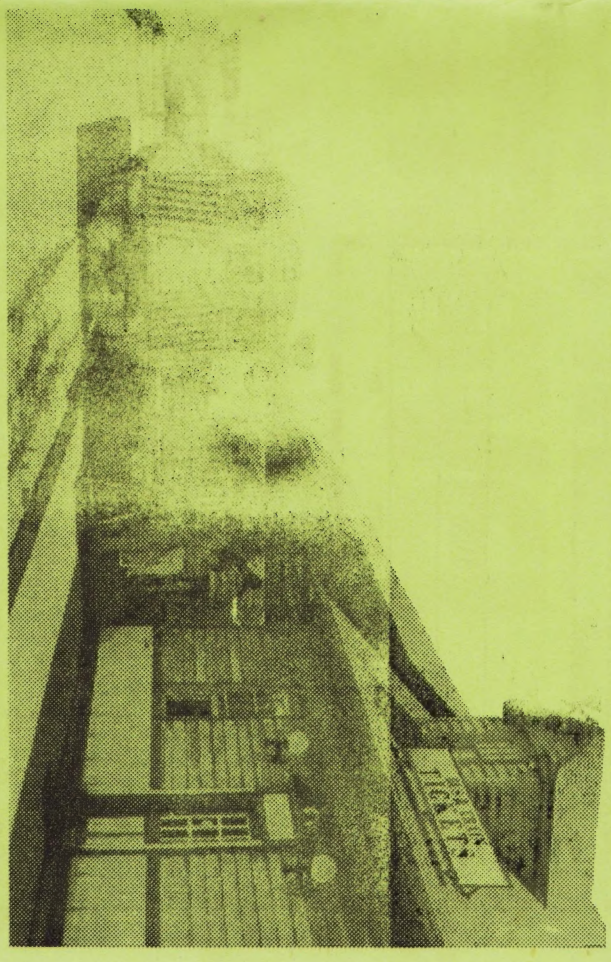

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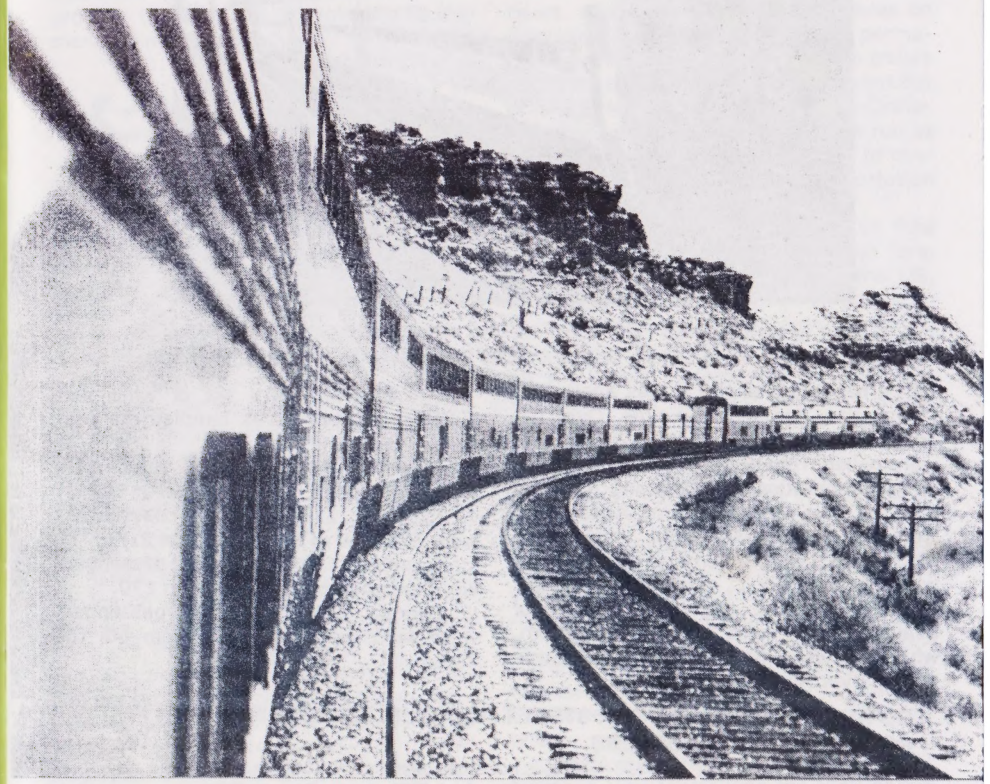

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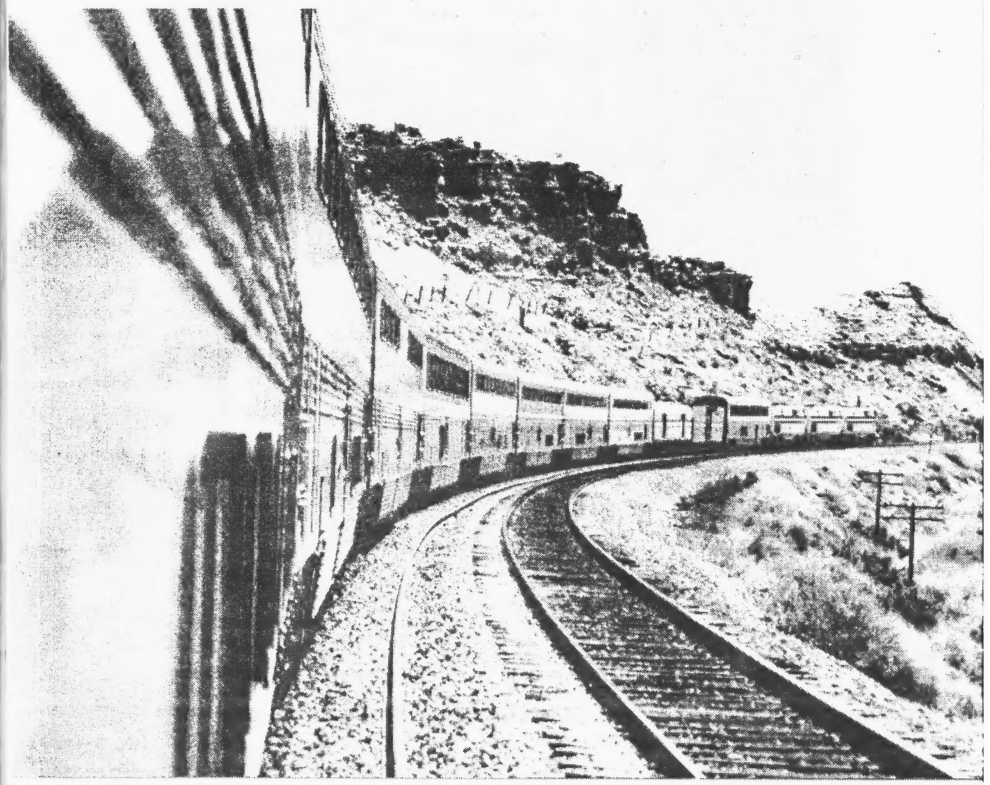

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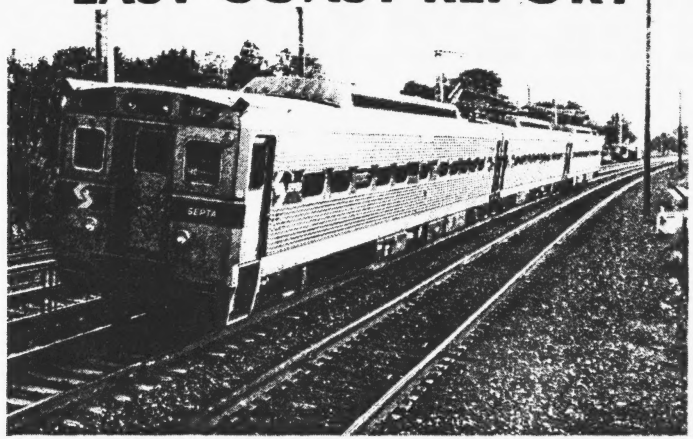
ON THE COVER

Amtrak train 4, the eastbound *Southwest Chief*, rolls through eastern Arizona or western New Mexico—there are places out in this picturesque wilderness where you lose track of exact locations—almost exactly five years ago, on May 10, 1998. In this issue, read the letter by MOKSRail President John A. Mills on proposed changes to the routing of this well-liked train, plus the latest news on the future of the *Southwest Chief*. Photo by Gene Poon.

EAST COAST REPORT



A set of three SEPTA cars, with unit 347 nearest the camera, passes the Claymont, Delaware SEPTA station on Sep 19, 2002. Bill Hakkarinen photo.

It's happened to the *Acelas* again, but not yaw dampers this time. Over the three days, Mar 31-Apr 2, six sets were pulled from service, resulting in nine of 44 cancellations and running Regional train 142 via the Shore Line Route from New Haven east. FRA inspectors discovered the problems in brakes and wheels, but didn't order them pulled. However, Amtrak did, due to lack of available parts from Bombardier-Alstom, who supervises maintenance at the three depots over Amtrak employees.

The following is a list of what was pulled and how Amtrak handled the passenger problems:

Express 2157 BOS-WAS, passengers were switched to following train 2159.

Express 2173 BOX-WAS, passengers were switched to following train 2175.

Express 2150 WAS-BOS, passengers were switched to Regional train 170.

Express 2114 WAS-NYP, passengers were switched to Regional train 80, the *Carolinian*.

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RAIL TRAVEL NEWS (ISSN 0896—4440) is published semimonthly (twice a month) by Message Media, 1611 #8 San Pablo Ave, Berkeley CA 94702. James Russell, Editor.
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Periodicals Class postage paid at Berkeley CA (USPS 006—012).
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.
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Express 2107 NYP-WAS, replaced by a Metroliner set.

Express 2164 WAS-BOS, replaced by a Metroliner set WAS-NYP and passengers were accommodated on Regional 142 NYP-BOS via the Shore Line Route. No mention of a shuttle for New Haven to Springfield service.

Regional 133 NYP-WAS, cancelled; passengers were switched to following train Regional 93.

Metroliner 122 WAS-NYP, cancelled; passengers were switched to following train Regional 196.

Passengers on 2107 & 2164 received credits for reduced Metroliner services, and I should note that Regional 133 is a Metroliner set in the "turn-to's" needed to provide the reduced Metroliner requirements in normal schedules.

—James Langan.

SEPTA

In response to a $55 million shortfall to its fiscal year 2004 budget, which it must balance by July 1, SEPTA proposes a range of fare hikes and service reductions affecting city and suburban transit and commuter rail.

The biggest cuts are the closure of four Regional Rail lines: R1 Airport, R2 Warminster, R6 Cynwyd and R8 Chestnut Hill West. Service frequency ranges from half-hourly, seven days a week on the Airport line to weekday rush plus one midday turn on the Cynwyd branch, the most lightly traveled of SEPTA's commuter lines.

SEPTA also proposes to end weekend service on the extremities of the R5 line, between Doylestown and Lansdale and Paoli and Thorndale, on the R8 Fox Chase line, and between Norristown Transportation Center and Elm Street on the R6 Norristown line, about one mile in the borough of Norristown. SEPTA further proposes cuts in weekday peak frequency on R5 Thorndale, R6 Norristown and R8 Fox Chase. Nine stations are slated for closure.

On the transit side, SEPTA proposes to discontinue five city and five suburban bus routes and drop route segments or decrease frequency on 11 city and 20 suburban bus and trolley routes. Many bus routes or added services have been launched only in the past several years to try to keep up with city-to-suburb commuting patterns. In only one case, dropping express trips and Sunday service on a route in Delaware County, is SEPTA citing low ridership.

A surprising cut planned by SEPTA is to close the Ridge Avenue spur of the Broad Street Subway line between Girard Avenue and Eighth and Market Streets, where it connects with the Market-Frankford line and the PATCO Hi-Speed Line to New Jersey. This subway runs Monday through Saturday, but is closed Sundays and holidays.

Other planned cuts are frequency reductions on the Market-Frankford and Broad Street Subway lines during midday hours, and "operate Sunday schedules on Saturdays." SEPTA also proposes permanent conversion of its five trackless trolley routes to bus. The three routes based out of the Bridge-Pratt and Margaret-Orthodox stops on the Frankford El have run as diesel buses for many months due to construction of the Frankford Transportation Center at Bridge-Pratt.

The fare hikes cover nearly all fare instruments except for the $2 cash fare, the highest base transit fare in the US, and the 50-cent zone charge on suburban routes. Transfers will go from 60 to 70 cents, probably the highest such charge on any transit system. Regional rail fares will rise, from 25 cents for each single ticket to $7.50 for the most expensive monthly pass.

SEPTA is repeating fare and service programs it has attempted in the past to spur state and local officials to action to come up with additional funding. Thousands of riders could be affected, many with no alternate means of travel. Most regional rail lines are partially duplicated by city or suburban bus routes, but few current train riders would readily switch to buses, which usually require a transfer to subways to reach downtown Philadelphia.

SEPTA is scheduling a series of public hearings May 12-19, one for each of five counties in its service area.

NJ Transit has again revised ridership projections for its Camden-Trenton light rail line and pushed back its opening to October or November of this year. Ridership is now predicted to be 5900 one-way trips, down from 9300. Reduced housing

and commercial development on the line has caused lower ridership predictions.

NJT plans to launch the line with free rides, then an introductory fare of $1.10, its base intrastate bus fare, a fraction of the fare on parallel bus lines between Camden and Trenton. As a result, cost recovery will slip to six per cent. The line is costing close to $1 billion to develop, and may cost $25 million annually to operate, plus $48 million annually in debt service for 18 years.

NJT and the consortium it has contracted to build and operate the line have run test trains on the line. Nine light rail cars are on the property, but both NJT and the contractor want all 20 cars delivered, tested and accepted before service will begin.—James Thornton.

●●●

NJ Transit customer service in Hoboken on Good Friday, Apr 18, had no new timetables. I was told to return on Monday. This office is closed Sundays, and since the removal of the timetable kiosk on the outside concourse, one had to ask a ticket agent for a timetable. There is now a small wall-mounted timetable rack near the door to customer service so timetables can easily be obtained when the office is closed, unless the supply runs out.

On Easter Sunday, Apr 20, the customer service office in Penn Station, Newark was *open*. This office was previously closed on Sundays. In the office they had bins brimming with the new timetables for all lines, effective Apr 27, except Atlantic City.

On the Raritan Valley Line, the new island platform station in Union (on the former Lehigh Valley) will open and all trains that stop at Roselle Park will also stop at Union. The station is listed as "Union Station" in the timetable. I wonder why? If all stations were so listed, we'd have the likes of Westfield Station, Plainfield Station, etc.

On the Montclair-Boonton Line, riders will see an easier transfer between electric and diesel trains when the western portion of the island platform at "MSU" (Montclair State University) is opened. On Good Friday I saw that a barricade had been set up on the platform, with all continuing construction being on the east side of the barricade.

Transfers will no longer be made at Montclair Heights, where passengers from one train to another had to walk down to the low-level platform, walk on the platform to the grade crossing, cross the tracks to the opposite platform, then climb the steps into the connecting train. In foul weather this must have been a real pain. Now the connecting train will be right across the platform. Currently, this is strictly a transfer platform and is listed as such in the new timetable.

Here we go again: Train 1077, the 1:52pm through train from Hoboken to Hackettstown via the Montclair-Boonton Line is once again a shuttle train from the "Transfer Platform", but there are excellent connections both from NY and Hoboken.

The mix of cars on NJ Transit continues. At first, the new Alstom cars seemed to run together, but on Good Friday I saw trains with Bombardier cars with an Alstom cab car, or a set of Bomb cars with an Alstom in the middle of the train. One can except someday to see a train with Bombs, Alstom and former Arrows as well. Who knows? It may have already happened.

The *Pony Express* will again run on weekends between Hoboken and the Monmouth Park racetrack May 24-Aug 31. This train runs directly to the track over a short siding "through the weeds." Certain North Jersey Coast weekend trains will also stop at the mainline station, which features gravel platforms. The only paved "platform" is located at whatever door stops on the Port-Au-Peck Ave grade crossing a short distance from the track.

Fares in the Main-Bergen and Pascack Valley timetables show new higher fares on the Metro-North, NY State portions, becoming effective May 1. And speaking of fares, the New Haven Line Connecticut portion fare increase planned for October might now be implemented as early as July due to the dire financial position of the state.

Returning from New Jersey on Easter Sunday afternoon, I noticed that ticket vending machines have blossomed on the westbound platforms at both Stratford and Milford. There is also one in the State Street station in New Haven. CT Transit has a timetable rack in that station filled with timetables, mostly dated Apr 27, but oddly there were no Shore Line East timetables there. In fact, I have never seen SLE timetables in that station, and none from Metro-North either.

In the new Metro-North New Haven Line timetable is an interesting advisory under "ticket buying tips": "Purchasing your ticket on board the train is a cash-only transaction and is the most expensive ticket-purchasing option. Quite true, as there are ticket-vending machines at every station.

Metro-North train service to State Street in the morning remains at two arrivals, but there are now four afternoon departures, up from three.

On an April 24 visit to New Haven Union Station, I found the timetable rack in Information stocked with new Shore Line East timetables, but there were no new Amtrak timetables. They didn't even get the National timetable yet, but the Northeast timetables books were in a cabinet behind the counter.

Most interesting was to see the listing for Metro-North train 3669 to Stamford. It runs with SLE equipment and was listed "Shore Line East".

Shore Line East timetable surprises: Train times are pretty much the same as before, but all trains have been renumbered into the 1600 series. The two morning departures from New London have been eliminated, but with monthly ticket holders able to ride on Amtrak train 2151 *Acela* (!!) at 6:35am and train 95 at 7:52am.

In the evening there is only one SLE to New London, but monthly ticket holders may ride Amtrak train 176 at 5:30pm and 94 at 7:30pm. On Fridays only and certain other days, train 1670 at 7:48pm runs through to New London. This train turns and returns to New Haven, making a stop in Old Saybrook only. Friday-only "early getaway" train 1626 (old 3626) is back again and runs May 23-Aug 29 plus July 3, Nov 26, Dec 24 and 31. Its express return from Old Saybrook also runs those days only.—Bob Underwood.

●●●

Severe thunderstorms in NE Florida on Apr 25 downed trees and caused other damage. The northbd *Auto Train*, #52, struck a fallen tree at 4:45pm on CSX track north of Seville, damaging the lead engine. Two engineers had minor injuries and the tree was lodged under the unit. Amtrak repairmen were sent from Sanford along with two new engineers and a conductor, and CSX workers also helped remove the tree. The train was delayed almost four hours, and train 92 behind it was delayed 52mins. The auto-carrying train had two engines and 37 cars and 482 passengers. The incident happened one year and one week after the Apr 18, 2002 *Auto Train* derailment in Florida, which killed six people.

Largest movable land crane in N. America was to be used early May 4, a Sunday, by Metro-North to place a 320-ft truss bridge span into place across the entire New Haven CT Yard, including nine mainline tracks. The train arrived disassembled in New Haven six months earlier and took seven weeks to assemble. It has a lifting capacity of 3.1 million pounds and requires a 6.4-million pound counterweight to stabilize it. The bridge is part of a Connecticut DOT project to extend Church Street, creating a direct link between downtown New Haven, the riverfront and nearby highways. Metro-North set up a safe viewing area on Union Ave that is patrolled by local police.

Metro-North on-time perf for the week ending Apr 27 was 97.5% systemwide. Year-to-date perf stands at 95.8%.

Boston MBTA's Silver Line, the new special-lane bus line on Washington St that replaced the No. 49 conventional bus, has found ridership on the street almost doubled, to 13,000 daily, reported the Boston Herald. The line, marketed as a fifth rapid transit line, was introduced in July, 2002.

Charlotte NC is likely to lease two streetcars from the Gomaco Trolley Co. in Ida Grove IA for use on a line between Charlotte's South End and uptown. Officials would like them to be running by this summer. They also checked with Portland OR and Tampa FL, but found no extra streetcars available there.

Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA), bi-state operator of the Philadelphia-Lindenwold PATCO Hi-Speed Line, wants to begin a study of extending commuter service from Philly and Camden to South Jersey, possibly by building a rail line along the Rte 42 corridor and in the median of Rte 55 to Millville. Local, state and federal officials are reportedly very supportive of the idea. The study should be completed by the end of 2003.

Secaucus Transfer station upper deck is scheduled to go into operation late this year. Work on it was essentially completed earlier in 2002, but held back because there was no room for transfer passengers on NY-bound NJ Transit trains due to changes after the Sep 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Even the work on the lower level bisecting NJT lines was slowed down. The Hudson Tunnels weekend work is on schedule for completion about the same time. This could then be a phased-in shuttle to and from NY Penn Station, using track B and reversing in the pocket track to track A, until the temporary PATH station reopens at ground zero. NJT has most of the rebuilt Comet II cars and new Comet V's in service now, so equipment is no problem.—Jim Langan.

Manassas Park city officials some time ago set aside 151 spaces in the VRE parking lot for use by residents only. VRE has tried to make the town relinquish the spaces, and now the Federal Transit Administration has declared that the town's actions are illegal, as the federal government paid for part of the lot and its laws on discrimination must be followed. Manassas Park is prepared to go to court over the matter.

Newark City Subway suffered an accident the evening of Apr 15 when a truck ran a red light and hit one of its light rail vehicles at Orange Street, causing some injuries to riders and derailing the vehicle.

A report by FEMA on the Baltimore rail tunnel fire of July 18, 2001 noted that citizens were calling the fire department before CSX did, while CSX was trying to determine the exact location of its freight derailment within the tunnel. (The freight crew's radio did not work within the tunnel, so the engineer called the dispatcher with his cell phone.) The fire department arrived about 1¼ hrs after the derailment. The incident escalated into a massive problem of fire, street collapse and flooding. The NTSB final report on the incident is expected later this year.

Acela fares lowered between Boston and NY: Amtrak announced Apr 22 that it would reduce *Acela Express* fares on the Boston-NY route Apr 28, "capping business class fares at $99 and cutting the fee to 'step up' to first class to $50 or less." Amtrak said that fares will be even lower for off-peak travel and to intermediate stops such as New Haven and Providence.

The $99 Boston-NY fare is a 22% cut from the previous fares of $102 to $119. Amtrak said that the fares do not require advance purchase, and will be available "indefinitely."

The Boston Globe calculated that the new roundtrip fare of $198 is about half that of an airline shuttle, noting that Delta's roundtrip fare is about $436.

Amtrak said that Amtrak Guest Rewards members will also receive double points for each such trip between Apr 28 and Aug 31. Earned points for a Boston-NY trip are 500 for business class and 750 for first class.

Amtrak believes business travel is set for a rebound this spring wants to be positioned to take advantage of that.

Acela fares between NY and Washington were not changed, and neither were the *Regional* fares.

Amtrak market share on the NY-Boston route has slipped from 49% to 37% over the first three quarters of 2002.

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Amtrak lowered fares on the New Haven-Springfield line as of Apr 28 and added more runs, making a total of 16 weekday trains, eight in each direction, compared to 11 previously. Fares on the route were lowered by as much as 50% or more. Monthly pass prices were cut in some cases even more than that.

The *Twilight Shoreliner* (overnight Boston-Washington) was replaced Apr 28 with the new *Federal*, and Amtrak issued a 30%-off introductory fare for it.

Maryland Transit Administration added "quiet cars" to eight morning MARC runs Apr 14. A MARC official said that its earlier experiment with the cell-phone and other noisemaker-free cars was a big success, "...probably the single most popular thing we've done." The "quiet" designation is given to the last car on the train.

●●●

WEST COAST REPORT

Amtrak California ridership continues to boom. In March (compared to Mar 02) *Pacific Surfliners* were up 35.3% in ridership, to 197,227, and ticket revenue was up 5.3% to $2,475,838. *San Joaquins* had 73,840 psgrs, a 20.8% increase, while revenue was down less than 1% at $1,474,315 due to the ending of a 3-week promotion in March. *Capitol Corridor* patronage rose 6.8% to 102,243 while revenue was down 1.1%, also due to the ending promo; it was $947,023. Each of the three services achieved monthly ridership records for each of the first six months of this fiscal year.

As of Apr 28, The *Capitols* now have 12 weekday round trips. *Pacific Surfliner* ridership continued to benefit from the Rail-2-Rail Program (joint honoring of tickets between Amtrak and Metrolink.

Cable car service on California St in San Francisco reached its 125th anniversary on Apr 10. A celebration was held at the Cable Car Museum and new car no. 60, which began service in Feb, was decorated for the occasion.

Dumbarton railroad bridge would be used for rail commuter service under a plan being discussed by various SF area agencies. The Dumbarton Rail Corridor would connect Redwood City and Newark and would be operated by Caltrain. About $129 million would be needed to put the line into shape for commuter trains. The rail line is already owned by the San Mateo County Transit Authority.

Funding the above service and others would be met by raising Bay Area bridge tolls by $1 under legislation introduced by State Sen. Don Perata (D-Oakland). Voters would decide on the plan next March, the tolls would rise July 1, 2004 if it is approved.

Besides the Dumbarton service, the $3 billion raised from tolls over 35 years would fund a number of other transit needs, including expanded ferry operations to serve Berkeley and South San Francisco; seismic retrofitting of the BART Transbay Tube; rebuild SF Transbay Terminal; Caltrain downtown SF extension; Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit rail extension San Rafael-Larkspur ferry; eBART commuter rail to eastern Contra Costa; provide transit operating money, and other projects.

Santa Cruz County (CA) Regional Transportation Commission on Apr 4 voted to apply for state Prop. 116 Clean Air and Transportation Improvement Act funds to assist in purchasing the UP Davenport-Watsonville rail line. It would be used for light rail service. The line is within a short distance of most tourist attractions in the county.

Sound Transit's Link light rail project in Tacoma WA had its ceremonial last weld Apr 7. The 1.6-mile system should open in Sep, offering service between the Tacoma Dome and S. Ninth & Commerce Streets.

State of Oregon is under a budget crunch, as are most states. The voters recently rejected an income tax increase, and with revenues falling, state officials are supporting a cutoff of funding for the Amtrak *Cascades* service between Portland and Eugene. The two daily round trips are funded by $9.3 million by the state. Only the *Coast Starlight* would remain on the route.

Washington Governor Gary Locke in late April vetoed a bill that would have forced Sound Transit to pay the costs of relocating utility lines in building its light

rail service. The veto was seen as a victory for public transit funding.

BART's extension to the San Francisco airport will open to the public June 22, a Sunday. On the Friday before, there will be a private reception and on Saturday a public ceremony. Four stations will be opening at that time: South San Francisco, San Bruno, Millbrae and the airport station. At Millbrae, BART will connect with Caltrain. Some BART trains will run directly to the airport, while others will terminate at Millbrae, with shuttle trains to the airport leaving from there. Maximum one-way fare to SFO will be $6.90, from Pittsburg/Bay Point.

BART is considering raising fares 10% next Jan 1, as it faces a $38.8 million budget deficit. Fares went up 5% in Jan 2003.

Seattle Monorail Project committee on Apr 29 approved a plan to use ticket gates for the monorail, even though barrier-free stations are the norm elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest. The committee concluded that gate installation will cost $3.1 million but will save more than that in one year by cutting fare evasion and precluding the need for inspectors.

Monorail planners have been debating whether to build the line through or around the Seattle Center campus.

Napa County Transportation Planning Agency said Apr 22 that starting up passenger rail service connecting the Napa Valley, Fairfield/Suisun and Vallejo would cost $216 million. Raising this amount would probably require voters to approve a sales tax increase.

Orange County (CA) officials said in late April that their CenterLine light rail system should be running by Oct 2009, two years earlier than previously planned. The 11.4-mile line will connect Costa Mesa, Irvine and Santa Ana.

BNSF has restricted all Amtrak P42 engines from *San Joaquin* service as a result of two incidents, on Apr 23 & 25. On both occasions, trains with P42s powering them failed to operate some grade crossing warning devices. Now the P42s cannot operate as the sole power on *San Joaquin* trains.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"Our new spring/summer schedule, which began April 28, offers a new overnight train (The Federal) between Boston and Washington. By leaving each city at 10 p.m., you can enjoy dinner before boarding the train. If you choose our Viewliner Sleeper accommodations, you'll be offered a private bedroom, on-board shower facilities and breakfast. Arrival the next morning is around 8 a.m., in time to make a morning appointment. (Of course, if you prefer to skip the bed and shower but keep the breakfast, our new Business class and coach accommodations will be your ticket.)

"Between New Haven, Conn. and Springfield, Mass., we've increased our weekday round-trips from five to eight. This will give Connecticut Valley passengers more trains to choose from and more flexibility in their travel plans.

"We've made improvements to our long-distance train schedules, too. For example, the Capitol Limited now departs Washington at a more convenient 5:20 p.m. and arrives in Chicago just before 11 a.m. the following day. This reduces connecting times for passengers boarding trains heading west. Also, the Lake Shore Limited now leaves Boston and New York about two hours later than before and arrives in Chicago at 9:10 a.m., also reducing connection time there..."

—Amtrak President David Gunn in "Arrive", the NEC on-board magazine, May-June issue.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"Today's California Street cable car line is more than a means of transport. It is a social institution that helped San Francisco earn recognition as 'The City Knows How.'"

—E-mailed notice of S.F. cable car celebration, Apr 5.

("The City That Knows How" may have some problems proof-reading.")

A Few Rail Updates and the War

By James Langan

March 24: It's been some week—the temperatures finally got into the 70s for two days last week, and I had planned a day in Newark for some current observations on the new "wave look" Amtrak paint scheme when Pres. Bush issued the 48-hour challenge to Iraq. We went to an "orange alert" again, flooding the stations and trains with transit police, state troopers and National Guard on subways, commuter trains and Amtrak, which meant forget it! No sitting around platforms for hours unless you had tickets valid for train travel that day.

The states of NY, NJ and CT signed an agreement that enabled the state police of the three states to make arrests in each other's territory without waiting for local police to arrive. Efficient and necessary, after the war started two days later. So, I will have to wait for my trip planned for three weeks around the country in May, including two operas—in Atlanta and Seattle—for any more platform and station viewing. My plans include the *Lakeshore Limited, Capitol Limited, Crescent, Empire Builder, Coast Starlight, California Zephyr* and *Three Rivers.*

So what does a railfan do under these circumstances? I phoned around to friends, who have closer contacts than I do with Amtrak goings-on and gleaned a few items. The most important were that wreck repairs at Bear DE have been jacked up and at least seven cars are on the shop floor in various stages including renumberings as well as ongoing regular maintenance. That has resulted in at least 14 coaches and five food cars of Amfleet I coming out in the new "wave logo" and six Amfleet II coaches as well, but from the Hialeah FL shop.

The seven wreck repairs are cafés 20044 & 20048 renumbered to 28351 and 28352, which means they will be reconfigured as full dinettes; and coaches 21003, 21092 and 21280, plus Metroliner coaches 21903 and 21908 completely modified for disabled access and all renumbered 21703, 21792, 21780, 21704 and 21713 respectively. Metroliner full first class 48981 was also released earlier this year and all are or will be in the "wave logo". Meanwhile, two Superliner sleepers, 32032 and 32053, were released from Beech Grove Feb 1, and transition-dorm 39044 on Feb 22.

The latest AEM-7 (not a.c.) #953, joined earlier "wave Acela" paint-only units 907 and 930 out of Wilmington. With 29 a.c.'s completed, the Alstom project is completed, and Amtrak didn't exercise the option because of funding problems. Supposedly, only four E60s are now in active service, all between NY and

(continued on page 12)

The author's upcoming trip will include the *California Zephyr*, pictured here at Grand Junction CO. Note the deadheading full-length dome behind the two engines. Photo by Bill Hakkarinen.

Riding the Rails to an Opera

By James Langan

It was off to Atlanta for a performance of The Magic Flute on Feb 27, finally—but not quite—out of the snow. I boarded a 40-min-delayed *Crescent*, train 19 at Newark NJ. The cause of the delay was the loading of decoration materials for Mardi Gras by the marketing rep for Corona and Budweiser beers.

Then the rep started to hang the decorations in our Smoker/Dinette 28018 "Jacksonville Club", with Budweiser next to the ceiling on the walls and Corona on streamers in the lounge and dinette along with multi-colored tinsel hanging from the ceiling and clear plastic "masks" on the windows.

The job was complete by the time we reached Trenton, with help from our crew and the attendant. Our tickets were not picked up until we left Philadelphia, but that didn't matter, since we were not discharging any passengers. Also, Mardi Gras colored beads were handed out to all, male and female.

The temperature leaving Newark was about 14 degrees, but by Washington it was in the upper 30s, more suitable for walking around to record the train's consist.

One important note: Stationmasters at all the NE Corridor stops were not informed that our baggage car was on the rear. The result was that the baggage carts were at the wrong ends of the platforms and could not pass by boarding passengers on our sold-out train (I got the last sleeper room and had ordered my tickets Feb 5). Thus we were losing about 10mins at each station: Trenton, Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore. They also couldn't open the baggage door at Philadelphia without maintenance employees, and we picked up an Express box car there that we dropped in Atlanta the next day. We were an hour late leaving Washington, and there it was time for dinner. I had an excellent filet mignon with a baked potato and fresh new asparagus with a small bottle of cabernet to top it off.

When we finally shifted to the Norfolk Southern at Arlington, we began to pick up time and were only off 30mins by Lynchburg VA, when I retired. There were only track detector announcements and engineer responses on my scanner (which I kept very low, not enough to keep me awake).

I was suddenly awakened by loud booms of something bouncing along the roof of the car and finally bouncing off the roof. Now the scanner was alive, and I overheard the engineer of a freight, NS #203, apparently ahead of us, telling the dispatcher about "hitting two trees overhanging the right of way, loaded down with ice". Then our engineer said he hit one and it had bounced over the engine and two cars following it (including ours). Both engineers were told to check it out at the next feasible stop. I opened the curtain to see a raging snow and ice storm reflected by our lights. Then I went back to sleep.

I awoke about 6:55am as we were leaving Salisbury NC, where we should have left at 1:57am! We were stopped somewhere north of there for four hours as the storm raged, and it was raining there, but there was no snow on the ground.

By the time I was dressed, we arrived in Charlotte NC, where train 80, the *Carolinian* to New York, was sitting across the platform awaiting an 8:10am departure. We had to wait for the baggage people to finish train 80 and then work our train and its Express Mail car. Quite a few pallets were unloaded! The final result was an arrival in Atlanta at 1:20pm, though we were scheduled for 8:58am.

Earlier in the week I had made arrangements with my son, who had sung the night before and usually sleeps late when having to perform four nights in a row, to grab a cab to the hotel and we would have brunch together. Well, he was at the station to pick me up and we still had brunch after I checked into the hotel. It turned out to work well for both of us.

While I was in Atlanta, MARTA made an announcement that Alstom of Hornell NY got a contract to rebuild the rapid transit cars at $1 million per car, saying they were quoted a $2 million each price for brand new cars, the other option.

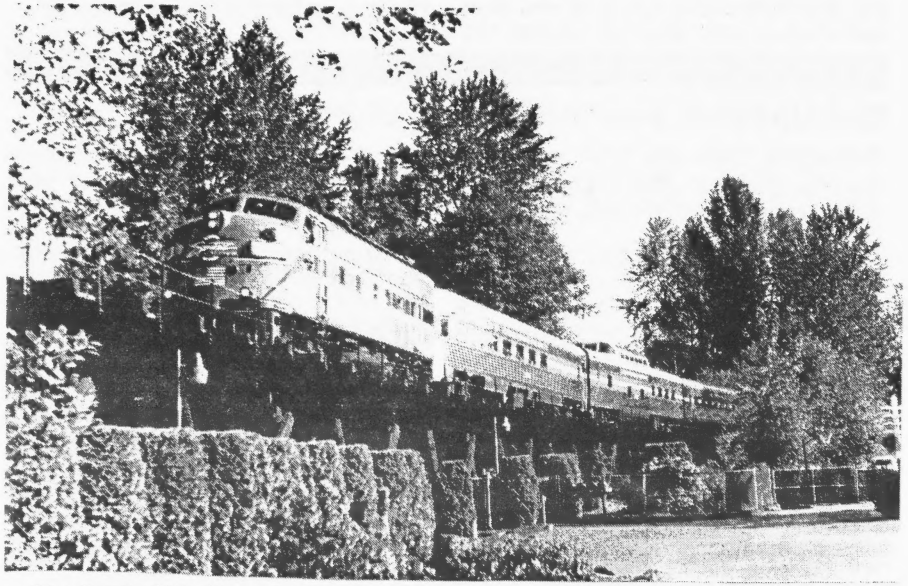
Our return trip had its ups and down also. The train was a half-hour late arriving Atlanta (but it had been 1½hrs at Meridian MS when I checked Amtrak's website earlier in the day.

However, boarding went smoothly and there was no mail car to add, and we were on our way by 8:38pm—only a 28-min stop. The diner apparently was not stocked adequately in New Orleans, resulting an a substitute flank steak, quite tough, for the filet mignon I had on my way down. My dining partners said their half-chickens were tough too, and there were no vegetarian meals at all. One of them, a coach passenger, went hers back for a full refund.

I have noticed recently that quite a few coach passengers are electing to eat in the diners of late instead of having sandwiches in the dinette. Amtrak should be more careful in stocking the diners if they want this trend to continue. Since this was the last sitting for the evening, I asked our server if they ran out before Atlanta; he said no, it was the same.

I finished my wine in the lounge with a cigarette and then was off to bed. My son and the Sarastro of the opera had a few beers the night before the performance, so didn't get to bed until 1am, so I was ready for an early turn-in.

We were in Charlottesville VA when I awoke at 7:15am, and I was in the diner for breakfast by the time we passed the Manassas Airport yard of Virginia Railway Express (which incidentally is considered part of Washington Terminal, as well as the Fredericksburg yard on the other route, as VRE service is provided by Am-



The *Spirit of Washington* dinner train eases across a short wooden trestle near Bellevue WA as it heads north on its run to Woodinville WA on May 26, 2002. Leading the train is former MARC F9PH No. 84, now painted a bright red, and on the rear is former MARC F9PH No. 82, similarly painted. The train is comprised of mostly stainless steel equipment from the early 1950s, including three half-domes and one full-length dome. This popular dinner train originates in Renton WA and provides gourmet meals and fine wines on its 45-mile roundtrip run. Upon arrival in Woodinville, passengers detrain and take a guided tour of the Columbia Winery and then participate in wine tasting before boarding the train back to Renton. The train usually runs at full capacity, so advance reservations are recommended. Photo by Alex Mayes.

trak, both crews and maintenance, with Virginia providing the equipment).

We arrived at Washington 35mins early, with only P42 engine 152 sharing the lower-level platforms with us. It was waiting for the arrival of #79, the *Carolinian*, to take it south.

We even left about 10mins earlier than the schedule, at 10:05am, following Metroliner 108, only slowing at BWI, as it was still loading, then it was full blast the rest of the way to Baltimore, for a short stop and the same at Wilmington.

I did notice here at Wilmington shop E60s 601, 602, 600 and 606 parked on tracks beside the building usually used for out-of-service locomotives. The building held an F40 and three or four switchers the last time I passed in November. Amtrak sold a bunch of switchers in December that were no longer needed, as Gunn decided to clean house.

Our arrival in Philadelphia was at 12 noon and we acquired a baggage-mail car, and were out by 12:15. It was clear sailing again until after we crossed the bridge at Trenton into track 4, where icicles disrupted our engine's pan, an HHP-8. We sat 20mins while our engineer reprogrammed his computer drives. It happened again at Fair interlocking and we lost another 10mins.

It was 1:40pm when we got up again for a fast run to Metropark, which was not a stop, but we had to wait for a stopping NJ Transit train to move to the local stopping track. Then we were home free for the rest of the run to Newark.

I was able to make the NJT local train I had hoped to get at Newark. It was #2303, a three-car diesel express nonstop to South Amboy, then all stops to Bay Head on the North Jersey Coast Line, the only afternoon through train. All others are electric, terminating at Long Branch with transfer to a connecting diesel shuttle the rest of the way.

I was in luck meeting a friend going home from his shift as a PATH engineer, who also drove me home, saving me an $8 cab fare. I was in the house by 4pm.

Rail Updates and the War (continued from page 9)

Philadelphia. I saw only three on my last trip (Feb 27-Mar 3): 603 and 604 on Keystone Services #647 and 648, and 610 on train 91, *Silver Star*.

Effective St. Patrick's Day, Mar 17, the "*Acela*" name was dropped on the Regionals. They are now just "Regional" and will appear as such in the public timetables April 28.

A Missouri service update: Herzog Transportation Service Inc. submitted a bid to MODOT to run the *Mule* services St. Louis-Kansas City. The company operates the Altamont Commuter Express (CA), Trinity Rail (TX) and Tri-Rail (FL) commuter services. Amtrak proposed a $5 surcharge on all passenger tickets, including the *Ann Rutledge*. No final decision yet.

A Florida service update has the *Silver Star* getting a third Viewliner sleeper, one of the two NY sleepers on the *Lake Shore Ltd*, due to a decline in passengers on westbound train 49 since the Oct 2002 schedule change. *Lake Shore* passengers dislike the 12:45pm departure time. I don't know if lunch is served on departure, but based on experience it would probably be Croton before they could serve, and it could mean only one meal, dinner, as passengers would have to be awakened in the wee hours for breakfast with that 7am arrival in Chicago. They also don't like being required to detrain at that hour and have a wait of 7-8 hours for western connections.

I have also learned that the *Twilight Shoreliner*, #66-67, is to be cut back to a Boston-Washington round trip and renamed the *Federal*, but I have no word whether it will lose its Viewliner sleeper. The Washington-Newport News portion will be a separate Regional #76-77 and coach only, but connections can be made to and from the new *Federal*. CSX is blamed for the change, which is nothing new. A 2:45am departure from NY sure isn't going to fill a sleeper. My own thoughts: add the sleeper to the *Three Rivers* and put on a diner, now that it no longer stops for freight in Harrisburg. It also has the latest departure from Chicago, serving as a catchall for late-arriving Western trains, and from Pittsburgh east in daylight with reasonable arrival times in Philadelphia and NY. Then call it the *Broadway Limited!*

RAIL CANADA

Vancouver transit planners are debating details of a light rail line connecting Richmond, the airport and Vancouver. The city council in April was debating how much tunneling should be done. Earlier, the Vancouver International Airport Authority formally decided to spend a maximum of $300 million to build a connecting line to the airport from the proposed Vancouver-Richmond line.

In a room ringed with artists' conceptions of intermodal transportation and filled with Metro Denver area transportation officials, David Collenette, Canada's Minister of Transport, declared, "I am a fan of rail! We simply have to do more to move people quickly and efficiently and we can do that by building high speed rail." He went on to describe a $3 billion (Canadian) project to increase the Quebec City-Montreal-Toronto-Windsor corridor to higher speeds by improving track, eliminating grade crossings and purchasing new equipment. He insisted that he was not trying to design a French-style TGV system, which he estimated would cost $12 billion, but rather improve speeds and reliability on the existing corridor.

Minister Collenette made his remarks at the annual Intermodal Transportation Institute's (ITI) North American Transportation Distinguished Lecture Series at the University of Denver Apr 8. His presentation was sponsored by OmniTRAX, a large international short line railroad operator based in Denver.

Though obviously very enthusiastic about high speed rail, Collenette quickly added, "The hardest part [of selling this idea] is to convince my colleagues, especially with Air Canada just going into receivership." He described the commitment made three years ago by the Canadian government to provide $400 million over a 5-year period for new locomotives, station refurbishing, and the purchase of 139 surplus Renaissance cars that had been intended for use on overnight trains through the Channel Tunnel between cities in Great Britain and continental Europe.—Jon Esty.

Honoring Victoria Day (May 19): VIA Rail ran a special fare promotion for the three-day weekend, which applied to any VIA tickets for travel to Toronto. The tickets were half-price between May 15 & 20. The discount was valid for all classes of service, and applied only to new reservations.

From various published reports, it was deduced that VIA's *Ocean*, when it is re-equipped with Renaissance cars, will have three diners. The train, #14/15, has three sets of equipment. Except for Tuesdays, when there are no departures, at any given night about 10pm the following is happening: One set, #14, at Charny is about to pass through Joffre Yard eastbd. Second set, #15, is at Campbellton NB, about to enter Quebec at Matapedia. The third set is overnighting at Halifax. From May to Oct, some sleepers on the *Ocean* run only between Montreal and Moncton. This allows them to make three round trips a week, instead of the two a week made by the Montreal-Halifax cars.—Tom Box & others.

MIDWEST REPORT

MinnARP president Andrew Selden, writing in the spring issue of Minnesota Rail Passenger News, discussed the proposed Northstar Regional Rail project, involving use of bilevel cars on the BNSF main line from the Twin Cities to St. Cloud via Anoka and Elk River.

Selden said the cities and counties on the corridor are enthusiastic supporter and have spent their own funds to develop the engineering studies to date and have pledged $27.8 million in local funds to help build the service. Public opinion polls show 70-80% popular support for the project.

Selden hopes Gov. Pawlenty supports the project, but if he did it would be a turnaround from his "almost mindless" hostility towards government programs in general, and transit programs in particular. (He does support public subsidy for private autos and rampant highway development at grotesque expense.)

MIXED TRAIN OF THOUGHTS

Amtrak *Cascades Service* train 752 skirts the eastern shore of Puget Sound at Titlow Beach WA as it heads northbound to Seattle on May 23, 2002. Bringing up the markers is a former Amtrak F40PH [the train's rear is at right in the photo], which has had its diesel prime mover and other internal components removed, and is now used as a combination baggage car and cab-control unit, commonly known as a "cabbage" within the railfan community. The passenger consist is comprised of 10 Talgo cars, which tilt as the train leans into a curve, allowing the train to travel at greater speeds. Leading the train is an EMD F59PHI. The entire train is in green and beige paint. Photo by Alex Mayes.

Amtrak is rumored, via a good internal source, to be near a decision to re-route the *Southwest Chief* via Amarillo because BNSF is demanding $50 million to maintain the current Raton Pass route to Class IV standards. Amtrak also reportedly feels that with air service to Amarillo as weak as it is, they will pick up many passengers by serving that city. This change would hit hard on current station stops such as Raton, Trinidad and La Junta, where other transportation options are poor.—Gene Poon.

The *Empire Builder* will no longer carry U.S. Mail, according to a late-April report. Evidently this change was a USPS decision. NARP complained publicly about the decision.

Sources within Amtrak say the company will sharply reduce capacity on the Chicago-San Antonio *Texas Eagle*, just in time for the summer travel season. According to the plan, effective Jun 8, the Chicago-San Antonio sleeper would be eliminated on the three days a week the *Eagle* carries through cars for L.A., meaning that the *Eagle* would never have more than one sleeper. The remaining car is already half sold out for the period. This move would create reduced capacity and potential revenue and would mean poor equipment utilization. Four times a week, on days the *Eagle* has no through cars to L.A., a lone Chicago-San Antonio sleeper would still operate. On three equipment turns, that sleeper would lay over for 32 hours in San An-tonio before returning northward. On the fourth turn it would lay over 56 hours in San Antonio.

Another planned cutback would remove a coach from the train, so it would have only two Chicago-San Antonio coaches, with a Chicago-L.A. through coach running tri-weekly. Further reports say that management wants to completely eliminate the full diner service on the *Eagle*, already cut back to Chicago-Ft. Worth, replacing it with a bistro service. These cutbacks do not reflect a reaction to any drop in ridership.—Gene Poon.

NEWS IN THIS ISSUE IS UPDATED THROUGH MAY 5, 2003.
Contributors to this issue not otherwise identified include Robert Abraham, Howard Bender, George Danchisen, Ken Maylath, Gene Poon, Ray Saunders, Jerome Sheldon, Barry Steinberg, Ed Von Nordeck and Walter Zullig.

The NHTSA released the 2002 data on traffic deaths, and they were up last year by 734 from 2001. About 42,850 people were killed on our highways. The agency said that rollover crashes, heavy drinking and increased numbers of drivers on the roads were the main factors in the higher slaughter. The NHTSA said that over half of the increase in numbers was due to rollover crashes with SUVs and pickup trucks. Rollover deaths numbered 10,626 or about a fourth of all fatalities.

The leading cause of death among Americans from birth to age 65 is highway crashes. As RTN said on its website, the US spends billions combating medical causes of death, but when it comes to the leading cause it drags it feet on granting a few million extra dollars to our national passenger rail system. Americans want alternatives to dangerous highways and failing and scary airlines, as various surveys have clearly shown.

And in all of this the government cannot or will not control the manufacturing sources of highway danger and carnage.

NARP released the following summary of its testimony on Amtrak before a House subcommittee Apr 30:

"Do not underestimate the significance of Gunn getting Amtrak to a 'state of good repair'. Amtrak has never been there before, which is why I do not say 'getting Amtrak *back* to that state."

That was the central message when National Association of RR Passengers Executive Director Ross B. Capon testified today before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads chaired by Jack Quinn (R-NY).

Capon was referring to the five-year plan Amtrak unveiled Apr 25. He said the combination of achieving 'good repair' and the many capital investments states and Amtrak have made in recent years means that the service Amtrak would provice under the plan would be far greater—and ridership far higher—than anything seen before.

"Just ask Illinois DOT—fresh from major track work on the Chicago-St. Louis line—what ridership would be like if Amtrak reliably dispatched clean trains, on schedules taking full advantage of the state's recent track upgrade work. Or ask Michigan the same question about Chicago-Detroit service, where one-third of the route already has a top speed of 90 mph, with 110 mph in the near future."

Capon urged adoption of RIDE-21 or the variation described in his statement as a way of supplementing the appropriations process, enabling further high speed rail development as well as some of the capital projects in the Amtrak plan.

Capon said travelers want choices both for long-distance and short-distance travel. Many travelers are medically unable to fly; others do not wish to fly. Earlier in the hearings, Rep. Howard Coble (R-NC) commented, "Airports are rapidly becoming my least favorite place to be."

Capon said eliminating all long-distance trains would leave a three-part balkanized "system" serving only 21 states. Chairman Quinn in his opening statement said, "I stand firm in my commitment to a national system. Simply eliminating the unprofitable long-distance trains will *not* fix all." Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) went further, "I don't think it solves anything."

Capon promised that NARP would review any detailed Administration plan carefully when it arrives. The plan, however, is already described as ending federal operating grants after six years, while providing only a 50% funding ratio for capital investments. Capon said that sounded like a formula for eliminating all long-distance and most short-distance trains.

Several legislators earlier in the hearing noted the dire condition of their states' finances.

There was near-unanimous support among committee members who spoke for federal funding for intercity passenger rail, although John Mica (R-FL)—who specifically expressed support for nationwide service—joined the Bush Administration in criticizing the present organizational structure for delivering that service.

(Capon's full written testimony is available at www.narprail.org.)

Amtrak has improved efficiency under president Gunn. In April 10 testimony, NARP summarized what Gunn has accomplished as follows:

Gunn and his key, new people have impressive knowledge specific to railroading and to budget discipline, which appears to be paying off already.

One change visible to passengers is the now-consistent, dining-car requirement that sleeping-car passengers sign their names and room numbers. Meals are included in the sleeping-car charge, but not in coach fares. Reinstitution of the signature process -- and an audit (comparing dining car checks with passenger manifests) -- aims to determine more accurately food/beverage revenues and costs and to help eliminate abuse (e.g., coach passengers getting free meals).

Amtrak is fixing, scrapping or selling equipment that has been out of use, realizing that there is a cost to the indefinite storage of such equipment. Elderly, costly-to-maintain coaches have been kept in service (especially on the New York-Philadelphia Clockers) while modern equipment that needed only minor repairs was sidelined; Amtrak is undertaking those minor repairs.

Amtrak is making good use of sizable inventories left over from previous projects cut short by funding shortages. For example, Amtrak has found orange upholstery to use when overhauling coaches with ratty old upholstery of the same color. The end result may not be the color one would have chosen for the new century, but it will be clean and new -- and did not require any new purchase.

Amtrak is covering a lot of old carpeting with plastic, which is easier to clean, and doesn't hold dirt, odor, or splashed coffee.

A new frequency -- the 10th Acela Express on the New York-Boston run -- was added January 27 without increasing crew costs.

Amtrak's organizational structure has been flattened compared with elimination of the Eastern and Western general manager positions, so that the seven divisional general superintendents now report directly to the vice president of operations.

Amtrak announced on January 24 that it would close its Chicago call center, the smallest of its three centers, at the end of December. Even if the number of agents added at empty desks in Riverside and Philadelphia equals the number of agent positions eliminated in Chicago, Amtrak expects to save $3 million a year in management, facility and technology costs. Any net reduction of agents -- such as might be possible because of the continuing migration of business to the internet -- would increase the savings.

Amtrak on April 25 unveiled a five-year plan that calls for about $2 billion in funding each year from the federal government. Amtrak president David Gunn presented the plan to the board of directors on April 24.

The Administration wants to spend only about half of that amount on Amtrak, and a DOT spokesman at once criticized the plan, saying that his department did not foresee asking Congress for more money for 2004 beyond the $900 million the DOT had already settled on.

Gunn's ideas are to keep the long distance trains, although anti-Amtrak sources in the Administration want to see them all discontinued. Gunn had already told a House Appropriations Subcommittee on April 10 that cutting out the long-distance trains would not save nearly as much money as Amtrak detractors think it would.

Gunn had told that subcommittee of six myths often brought up in discussions of Amtrak' funding and future:

Myth #1 - Amtrak can be profitable.

No national rail passenger system in the world is profitable.

Without public subsidy, there will be no passenger rail transportation systems in the United States.

Myth #2 - The private sector is dying to take over our services. Remember why we were formed. We are what is left of a once privately run enterprise.

Myth #3 - Long-distance trains are the problem.

This is perhaps one of the biggest myths. If you eliminate every long-distance train, your avoidable costs would decrease about $70 million a year-after about a year and a half of making labor protection costs. On a fully allocated basis, after five years, you might save annually about $300 million. Focusing on this problem is not going to save Amtrak. This approach is a red herring.

Myth #4 - Amtrak is a featherbed for labor.

Our wage rates are about 90% of the freight industry and are even lower when compared to transit. Wages are not the problem; generating a higher level of productivity, that is the challenge. It is management's duty to seek such improvement.

Myth #5 - The Northeast Corridor (NEC) is profitable.

The NEC may cover most of its above-the-rail costs, but it is an extremely costly piece of railroad to maintain. The NEC is not profitable and never will be. Sure, private groups might be interested in having it, but they would take it only with the promise of massive capital infusions.

Myth #6 - There is a quick fix - reform.

The word reform is like catnip to those interested in a quick fix to Amtrak. If the answer were quick and easy, we would have solved the problem long ago. What needs to be done is to tightly manage the company and its finances and begin to make incremental but critical improvements to plant and equipment.

Amtrak's plans over the next five years include renovating NE Corridor tunnels and replacing ancient catenary wires. They also include installation of 162 miles of concrete ties and replacement of 270 miles of track. Amtrak wants to bring its car availability up to 90% from the present 81%, over the next five years, by repairing wreck-damaged equipment.

Amtrak wants to buy 14 RDC cars for New Haven-Springfield service and replace 75 older cars with new ones.

He told the House subcommittee that the five-year plan "will show that with a consistent level of funding from FY04 through FY08, we will bring the railroad up to a state of good repair. If fully executed, our equipment will be in good condition on regular maintenance cycles, improving reliability and utilization, and the backlog of critical needs to our Amtrak infrastructure will be gone. Regardless of what policymakers decide is the future for Amtrak or rail passenger service in the United States, I would argue that the steps outlined in our plan would have to be done in any case and the first down payment on that would be in FY04."

CARS & CONSISTS

***Pennsylvanian,** train 42, Pittsburgh PA Feb 17: engine 158; cars (coaches) 20251 café & business class, 44553, 20255 & 25074. Same, train 45, March 1: engine 810; cars (coaches) 20141 café & business class, 82502, 21194, 82074 & 25003.—Robert Abraham.

***Vermonter,** train 55, New Haven CT Apr 24: engine 827 (P40) off, 927 (AEM-7) on; cars 481?1 food service (poor paint with one digit from car number missing), 82504, 44019, 44834 bus. class, 44923, engine 814 (P40) off. Arrived 3mins early, left on time. Car 44834 had the 3-sheets logo on one end, and car number was on both ends of car, in line with window bottoms. Interesting train, with three different paint schemes.—Bob Underwood.

***Wolverine,** train 350, Dearborn MI Mar 16: engine 33 (P42); cars 35007 coach-snack, 34020 & 34002 coaches. Arrived 40mins late. **Twilight Limited,** train 355, same: same consist.—George Danchisen.

RAIL FANTRIPS

May 10, 17, 31: James River Rambler. 3.5-hr trip from Dillwyn VA to New Canton or 1.5-hr trip to Johnson. Heart of central VA. $20 & $10. Old Dominion Chapter NRHS, Box 1771, Glen Allen VA 23060-0660. 1-800-451-6318.

May 18: Naugatuck RR, end-to-end ride on historic RR; Thomaston CT-Torrington, Waterville & Waterbury CT RT. "Tour of the Line." $49. Lunch $8. Boston bus $30. Mass Bay RRE, Naug. RR Excur., Box 96, Peabody MA 01960-0896.

May 31: Boston Harbor Rails & Tugs Cruise. Day of rail & marine history and photography afloat. Limit 75 psgrs. $45. Mass Bay RRE c/o V. Campbell, 27 Beale St #7, Dorchester MA 02124-4801.

Jun 14: Evening Cruise to Boston Light; from Wellington T Station 3:30pm or So Sta 4pm, back 10pm. Cruise boat to Boston Light on Little Brewster Isl. $35. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136. www.mysticvalleyrs.org.

Jun 30-Jul 5: Hard-core rare mileage in ND & SD. Bus Minot to Max ND, train to Bismark, Hankinson, Aberdeen SD, Wolsey, Brookings, Winona. Bus to Amtrak & airport. About $3500. Interested? E-mail clarkjohnson@cpinternet.com. High Iron.

Aug 2-17: Southwestern Tracks. Boston So Sta *Acela* to DC & Capitol Ltd, SW Chief; Grand Canyon, San Diego. $2200 up. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136. 617-361-4445 or www.mysticvalleyrs.org.

Aug 16-24: Montreal, Maine & Atlantic RR (ex-B&A, CP in Maine). Priv cars on Adirondack NY-White Riv Jct, Wash Co. RR, MM&A; Newport-Farnham-Sherbrooke-Jackman, etc. 1991 miles. $4450 NY RT. High Iron; clarkjohnson@cpinternet.com.

Aug 30-Sep 1: Steam in the Poconos. Bos-ton area to Pocono Mts of NE Penna, visit Steamtown in Scranton, cruise Lake Allenpaupack. $325 double. Mystic Valley Rwy Soc, Box 365486, Hyde Park MA 02136. 617-361-4445 or web site above.

Oct 17: Priv rail car travel, Morristown & Erie Rwy. NY-Montreal, 3 days, 2 nights. Shop, museums, sightsee. $525; hotel extra. Morristown & Erie Rwy, Box 2206, Morristown NJ 07962. 973-267-4300. Or e-mail charterservices@merail.com.

Send large SASE to addresses. One listing in RTN is free. It must give specific dates of operation. Write: Rail Travel News, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709 or e-mail to rtn@trainweb.com.

Enjoying the *Auto Train*

By Walter E. Zullig Jr.

The winter had been cold with much snow in the N Y Metropolitan area and we were glad to finally leave for Sunny Florida via Amtrak's *Auto Train* on Feb 5. The trip had been booked on the Internet several months earlier, and the tickets mailed to us from Amtrak's Philadelphia office.

We left our home in Westchester County, NY, about 8:20am and had no traffic delays on the way to Lorton, VA, where we arrived at 1:50pm. The valet took our car for loading and we entered the station, which was rather full, since the train had not yet opened. While my wife caught up on some reading I went outside for some photos and to record the train's consist. As usual, the train was spotless and made a very attractive appearance sitting in the afternoon sun.

Genesis locomotives 127 and 42 were in the lead followed by a diner, lounge, four Superliner coaches, three sleepers, another diner, a lounge car, three more sleepers and a crew sleeper in that order. Two of the sleepers, "Palm Bay" and "A. Philip Randolph," were equipped with only deluxe bedrooms on the upper level; the other four were standard Superliner sleepers.

Boarding was announced about 2:30 and we soon were settled in our standard bedroom in the "Rhode Island." The attendant recognized us from a previous trip and was quite friendly. One thing he couldn't help with, however, was the absence of soda and juice that used to be set out at the top of the stairs. He explained that these were eliminated as an economy measure but that drinks could be purchased in the lounge car. Only coffee, hot water and ice now are available in the sleepers. On some previous trips the car attendants even had wine available so this change was a definite service downgrade; however, it was the only negative aspect of the trip.

All autos must be at the terminal by 3pm in order to make the train. One pulled in at 2:57—a close call. As soon as that car was loaded the crew began making up the train and we pulled down about a half-mile at 3:21. The auto carriers were then attached to the rear of the train, a brake test was made, and we departed for Florida at 3:36, well ahead of the scheduled 4pm time. Shortly thereafter, the traditional announcement was made regarding the consist, schedule and passenger and auto load. This practice can be traced to the original Auto-Train Corporation that started the service, which was taken over by Amtrak sometime after ATC had gone bankrupt and was liquidated. Our train had a somewhat light load: 252 passengers, of which 99 were in the sleepers and 153 in the coaches. There were 115 autos and 19 vans—no motorcycles this trip.

We soon adjourned to the lounge car for refreshments. It's always interesting to overhear conversations on trains. While passing through Ashland, VA: "Look—we're running right down the middle of the street!" Cell phones were very much in evidence with multiple conversations underway in the lounge car as we moved through southern Virginia. While crossing the James River on the former ACL high bridge, I noticed that two new homes have been built somewhat down the slope from the large home I had always admired on the northeast bank. Their view of the river and railroad remains fairly good.

Before long, the second call for dinner was made and we entered the Superliner diner. As on previous trips the car made a beautiful appearance set with the plates, silverware and maroon tablecloths. We were seated with a retired pharmaceutical lobbyist who was from Phoenix but lived in the Washington, DC area for many years. I had noticed him earlier as he was a big talker, and a big tipper as well. He thought his sole-occupancy deluxe bedroom was a little small and wondered how the two of us would fit into the smaller standard bedroom.

We had an excellent dinner and some good conversation. Since I always am seeking to engender political support for Amtrak, this subject soon came up. When I attempted to explain that no passenger railroad in the world makes money, he asked one of the waitresses whether "this train makes a profit." Once she confirmed that "it does" he suggested that only trains such as this that make money should be retained. I attempted to explain such matters as equipment and overhead costs but lost him. Anyway he did very much enjoy his trip.

The car attendants encourage everyone to go to sleep before 10pm, presumably so they too can get a good night's sleep. Our attendant kindly held off until about 10:15 so we turned in shortly thereafter. Actually, the long drive and the wine with dinner had made me drowsy so I dropped off to sleep shortly after our very smooth crew change stop in Florence, SC, at 10:25.

We awoke about 6:45am. As usual the initial reaction is a sleepy "where the heck are we? Are we on time?" These questions soon were answered by an announcement one does not often hear on Amtrak. The train had encountered very little delay during the night and now was running well ahead of schedule. Our arrival at Sanford would be around 7:30 but the train cannot enter the terminal until shortly after 8am when the employees come on duty. "So continue doing what you're doing, have breakfast and enjoy yourselves." We reached Sanford on the main line at 7:22 just as I emerged from the washroom. Breakfast was had while the train sat there. As usual it was a good Continental one with juice, cereal, bananas, rolls, bagels and ever flowing coffee dispensed by the friendly crew. Our table companions were a couple from New Jersey headed for Sarasota.

Only a few minutes after 8 o'clock the train slowly moved into the terminal. The passenger cars were split into two sections for unloading and we were able to detrain about 8:15, ahead of the 8:30 scheduled arrival time. Our auto came off at 9:05 and we were on our way to southeast Florida by 9:10.

We had enjoyed the trip and it's good to see that the *Auto Train* continues to provide excellent service with good equipment. And it was good to escape from the Northeast winter!

THE OPEN VESTIBULE

(To Kansas Senators and Congressmen.) As you are aware, there has been an attempt in the past by BNSF to re-route Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*. This would result in Hutchinson, Dodge City and Garden City losing their present rail passenger service. The re-route would turn the train south of Newton to pass through Wichita-Wellington and continue on a presently highly-congested freight line to Amarillo and rejoin the present route 30 miles south of Albuquerque. So

far Amtrak has prevailed and the train continues to serve western Kansas, south-east Colorado, plus Raton (heavily used by Boy Scout campers), Lamy (stop for Santa Fe NM) and of course Albuquerque NM.

Recently members of the Oklahoma Congressional delegation have approached both Amtrak and BNSF urging a more circuitous and much slower routing of the train. After turning south at Newton, it would pass through Wichita, Arkansas City, Ponca City, and at Perry OK turn northeast toward Enid and Avard OK. There it would join the current heavily congested freight line to Amarillo, joining the current passenger line south of Albuquerque. This route is longer and much slower than had been previously proposed and in addition has over 90 miles of "dark unsignaled" track which is very undesirable for passenger train operation, with speeds of 59mph vs 79-90mph on the present western Kansas line. In order to serve Albuquerque, an additional 60-mile roundtrip detour and two or more additional hours to the schedule would be required.

I hope your reaction to this attempted "larceny" is what is best for Kansans This re-route would not benefit the traveling public. The citizens of Wichita currently drive the short distance to Newton to board the train. Western Kansas has limited public transportation, and the stations at Garden City and Dodge City have just bee upgraded, costing the taxpayers millions of dollars.

The Missouri-Kansas Rail Passenger Coalition strongly rejects this interference on the part of the Oklahoma Congressional delegation and seeks your support on keeping the *Southwest Chief* on its current route. We do support an extension of the present *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City north to connect with the *Southwest Chief* at Newton KS. This would require funding by both Oklahoma and Kansas, or by Amtrak to be accomplished.

John A. Mills, President
Missouri-Kansas Rail Passenger Coalition
Mission, Kansas.

I would like to make a clarification regarding the Amtrak Cascades service to Vancouver BC (see RTN 655, p. 3).

The fence at the Vancouver BC station was constructed back in 1995 for the beginning of service into Canada. This was not the result of increased security due to 9/11, as implied in the article, but as a Canadian Customs requirement to ensure proper immigrations and customs checks.

Customs and immigration inspections into Canada are still relatively quick and painless. Canadian Customs and immigration checks rarely take two hours, as stated in the photo caption. Generally, most passengers are cleared through the process in 30 minutes or less. Occasionally there can be delays, but they are the exception rather than the rule. This gives Amtrak Cascades riders plenty of time to have lunch and enjoy a nice afternoon in Vancouver BC before returning on the 6pm return trip to Seattle. We believe that this arrangement is far superior to other Amtrak trains, which are required to stop and wait at the border for time-consuming customs and immigration inspections.

Amtrak, WSDOT and the Department of Homeland Security are continuing to work to improve the process for clearance into the US as well.

Jeffrey T. Schultz
Rail Operations and Technical Expert
Washington State DOT

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